

# **ALIA Library Technicians' Symposium 2017**

**Convergence in the GLAM sector - the challenges.**

**Lynne Cullen 2017**

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Cities and countries need great museums, galleries and libraries. They represent the culture, history, significance and development of a people and a nation. In troubled times they can improve morale and provide a focus on craftsmanship and beauty.

Who/what is GLAM or GLAMR? For those of you unfamiliar with the acronym, it represents Galleries, Libraries, Archives, Museums and the R – for Records Management. The term is universally acknowledged in Australia and has been recognised by the relevant institutions and associations, as demonstrated by the birth of the organisation GLAM Peak. ([digitalcollections.org.au](http://digitalcollections.org.au))

Gaps in the knowledge about the GLAM sector are significant for library workers, but these can be bridged; gaps in the understanding about cultural heritage can also be bridged. Similarities across the GLAM sector exist in operational methods and in challenges, to the extent that library employees are able to cross between sectors and bridge the gaps between institutions and their working environments. The skills of Library Technicians in the information industry need to be recognised and utilised for possible opportunities.

‘Cultural heritage’ is defined as a legacy of historical artefacts. These can be tangible as in the case of monuments, buildings, books, works of art, coins, manuscripts or intangible such as folklore, oral traditions, performing arts, language and rituals. It can also include natural heritage such as land formations and significant landscapes. It has consistently been inherited from the past, whether tangible or intangible; cultural or natural.  
(UNESCO, 2017; Wikipedia, 2017)

Widely acknowledged is the recognition of the role that ‘digital heritage’ is playing across all collecting institutions and the recognition that this is the common denominator which provides the opportunity for the institutions in the GLAM sector to work closer together and to converge and collaborate. Whilst there is dispute about whether the digital surrogate (or digital version) can ever reflect the true qualities of the original, the digital copy still provides the opportunity for researchers and creators to make use of the information and value that the digital surrogate can provide. (Brown, 2010)

The power of an original is often reflected in the tumultuous emotions it can create in an individual; old memories can surface and ignite old emotions. To find a photo of a past relative or documentation of a person’s childhood can be very evocative. Some of these original documents can be held, touched and absorbed. It is this physical experience which contrasts with the digital visual experience.

The term ‘digital heritage’ has evolved recently and reflects the amount of cultural heritage which is now available for access in digital form. This also includes the information that has now which has originated in digital form or is ‘born digital’. What is the significance of digital heritage? Why undertake the process of digitising collections and making heritage collections available for

access by everyone? At the top global level, UNESCO and the United Nations have demonstrated interest and concern, consequently developing recommendations for worldwide management of digital heritage and driving this from a global level.

Traditionally it has been libraries, archives, museums and galleries that have been responsible for storing, displaying and preserving the intellectual and cultural resources produced by all of society. This has been an overriding mission for all of these institutions in their role as collecting institutions. This role and mission has been identified as in jeopardy because of the sheer amount of data and digital information now generated on a worldwide stage. Information which is created and shared frequently in the digital form is easily lost if it is not identified for preservation purposes. UNESCO has recently developed guidelines for selection of digital heritage for preservation, such is the calibre of this risk and the recognition of how easy it is to lose a nation's digital heritage. (UNESCO, 2017). This is evident in the UNESCO Charter on the preservation of Digital Heritage. In this Charter they have used the term 'digital heritage' and identified the significance of it.

"...resources of information and creative expression are increasingly produced, distributed, accessed and maintained in digital form, creating a new legacy – the digital heritage."  
(UNESCO, 2017)

Furthermore the parent United Nations body have drafted a 2030 agenda for sustainable development. This paper has called upon governments worldwide to act on two major issues. The first is to safeguard and protect the world's cultural and natural heritage. The second is to ensure that public access is provided to this information as a fundamental freedom for all people. (IFLA p.1)

The significance of digital heritage has been demonstrated by The National Library of New Zealand. They state that sharing digital knowledge has enormous benefits as it can spark the creation of new knowledge and ideas, potentially leading to innovation and economic growth. (National Library New Zealand, 2017) The New Zealand National Library has identified the digital network of cultural heritage in their recent Strategic Directions 2030 document. This document encourages the removal of barriers to knowledge and highlights the siloed manner in which physical resources have traditionally been collected. It encourages the growth and development of digital collections because the benefits are of cultural and economic value. They are essential for the preservation of knowledge for the future. Digital collections are identified as a means by which new knowledge can be created. This will occur at a higher level if the cultural institutions collaborate and form partnerships to facilitate this.

This prevailing attitude features across all of the GLAM sector. The common mission across the sector is the mandate 'access for all'. This also implies the notion of 'open' for all. Additionally, mission statements consistently emphasise the aim to enlighten, to educate, to promote and to facilitate lifelong learning.

However despite the similarity in mission and vision, the institutions remain physically diverse as each institution across the sector is content based and collection focused. Without their diverse collections they would not exist. It is as a result of technology and the growth of the digital heritage collection that advances in collaboration and convergence are evident. (An example of the European Library is provided later.)

The GLAM sector needs to communicate why they do what they do and why what they do makes a difference. It is the digital agenda that is making this a viable task for the institutions to undertake in an attempt to spread the word. We all know that those collections are important but how can the institutions communicate why they have value and demonstrate their significance? Digital technology provides one way of communicating and demonstrating this. It provides the platform by which an institution can demonstrate what they believe in and what they stand for. It enables you, as an employee, to identify what you believe in by working there. The idea that the cultural heritage institution has 'authority' and does not welcome the lay person has been slowly disappearing as the digital heritage collection and the user experience has grown.

The cultural heritage legacy has three terms which are often talked of as impacting the all institutions: digitisation, collaboration and convergence. Collaboration can be defined as the opportunity to learn another's methods of practice, ways of operation, practices and procedures. The collaboration between projects and management has been identified by Myborgh as the key to the convergence of the institutions. ( 2011)

The basic premise has been that each individual institution has unique goals, missions, purpose and collection. Each institution has been managed differently and has employed staff with different qualifications and diverse areas of specialisation. The growth of technology has meant the creation of the digital collection. It is the 'digital heritage' that has allowed for the collaboration and the convergence, whilst the institutions can keep the physical still within their own physical storage and display environment. An example of this is the digital database Memory of the Netherlands, which is a collaboration by museums, libraries and archives to create the digital collection of the Netherlands. (<http://www.theeuropeanlibrary.org/tel4/collection/a0027>) This project has brought the institutions together so that there is a necessity for curation of the digital data, whilst the physical entities still exist in their own right.

All cultural institutions are a part of a world in transition. We experience technology that develops exponentially; we experience climate change and massive demographic changes. Cultural institutions have responded by continuing to develop, often with meagre resources. They respond nimbly and effectively to this situation and learn from each other. Within each institution the physical and the digital are converging in terms of the significant collections of each institution. The importance of the user and the user experience is paramount and at the centre of the operation. All institutions are concerned

with communication, engagement, vision and building relationships. They are aware of the changing and developing customer expectations. The notion of the institution as the 'authority' has declined.

The challenges across the GLAM sectors are also not experienced in isolation; they are similar in most respects. Examples of the challenges facing GLAM institutions include:

- Partnerships – consideration of partnering with other organisations to develop programs and services and engage the user
- Reorganisation of spaces
- New programs – experimenting with these and combining with technology to create new often interactive experiences
- Curation of the resources and the digital collection
- Forming and implementing digital strategies
- Measuring the use of digital resources

Digital heritage brings with it additional digital challenges which also defy the siloes of the cultural heritage institutions. Challenges include:

- Preservation of the digital – how can an institution do this to the best of their ability? Which standards should apply?
- Copyright and intellectual property issues – these abound and need to be dealt with on a case by case basis
- Funding issues and financial sustainability
- Ownership and licensing
- Significance/selection –for the physical and digital collection
- Staffing

Within each institution there are significant issues and challenges. One of the more common issue in major collecting institutions is the different collections held separately that may be digitised and recorded in different digital asset management systems which do not connect with each other. (Jones, 2015) Information which needs to be connected because of its similar context may be digitally not linked. This may take place both within one institution's diverse collections and across different institutions.

Some of the issues may be more relevant than others to individual institutions, but are they really very different to the workplace challenges in your current work environment? The struggles one organisation experiences will often be replicated many. The skills and knowledge that you employ in your everyday employment can be applied to the challenges in cultural heritage and digital heritage in whatever form this may take. Be aware of your skills, understand the contribution that you can make and promote your own industry successes. No one will deny that access to records increases with digitisation or that technology increases the access. These are both features at the cutting edge of the library world. Expand your knowledge; share it with other sectors. You may find that there is more focus on the digital content than on the physical. The digital collection in cultural heritage institutions may experience more visits

than the physical collections. The requirement for this measurement and data analysis is a familiar role for all libraries in validating their resources. (Proctor, 2016)

Digital heritage has reformed and reshaped the way that users can view cultural heritage. It has enabled access to become simpler and easier, allowing information to be sourced from the desktop and research conducted from afar. The boundaries and the barriers between institutions have been broken down by the possibility and the reality of digital heritage and a digital legacy. (Myburgh, 2011) Technology has blurred these boundaries and opened up opportunities for collaboration and convergence. Institutions do not have to operate in silos any longer.

The following links are the product of successful digital strategies and complex projects that have materialised into digital spaces. Think about the benefits of these digital collections. Note that collaboration and partnerships have grown and bridges built not only between institutions and their stakeholders, but with the users as well. The result has been the development and growth of digital communities which have enabled newcomers to participate and to learn. These communities do not require a qualification or relevant experience, just an interest and a willingness to learn. However it will be your experience and qualifications that enables the digital heritage to be curated and accessible.

<http://archives.unimelb.edu.au/news-and-events/red-cross-ww2-cards-now-online>

After the handover of the Red Cross national and state archive to the University of Melbourne Archives, Dr Katrina Dean made this positive comment about the benefits of access to the archive:

‘social and historical researchers, as well as members of the community seeking family history or community group information. The collection will also be used to support teaching and learning.’

(Red Cross, 2014)

The CEO of the Red Cross highlighted the benefits of making the archive accessible and open:

‘We are....honoured the University of Melbourne would curate its archives and make them available to future generations, so they could tell the organisation’s stories in new and different ways.’

“We could no longer afford to maintain our extensive archives, so we decided to make this donation as a gift to the nation, to preserve and share our great Australian story of the extraordinary generosity and compassion of everyday people helping people over a century,”

(Red Cross, 2014)

The significant comment that they could no longer afford to maintain the archive but that they could partner with UMA reflects the status and responsibility of the GLAM sector and the willingness to collaborate between institutions.

Atlas of living Australia <http://www.ala.org.au/>

Biodiversity heritage library <http://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/>  
Global biodiversity and botanical libraries combined literature database

Encyclopedia of life <http://www.eol.org/about>

Bodleian Library <http://digital.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/>

The Vatican <http://digi.vatlib.it/>

The Digital handbook known as Hack 4 Heritage examples:  
<http://timsherratt.org/digital-heritage-handbook/events/heritage-hack-connections/>  
or the heritage 'unconference':  
<http://blogs.brown.edu/hackingheritageunconference/>

<http://www.digisam.se/about-us/?lang=en>  
A program of the Swedish National Archives

<http://sustainableheritagenetwork.org/>  
Explore the partnerships – libraries, archives, museums

<https://www.mpd.l.mpg.de/en/>  
Max Planck Digital Library in Munich

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